

It is an agenda that favors not those at the very top, but everyday Americans who are struggling to achieve the American dream in the 21st century. Unfortunately, the past 20 years in America have been a story of middle-class decline. Even before COVID, the Federal Reserve estimated that over 40 percent of Americans in this day and age would still—still—have trouble covering an emergency expense of just \$400, which you can easily incur if you have to fix your car, make repairs at home, or visit a doctor.

A few decades ago, the story was very different. For much of the post-war era, most Americans had confidence that if you were willing to work hard, you could save a little and you could leave something behind for your loved ones. Nobody was guaranteed riches, but the basic bargain in America was that those who put in an honest day's work would be able to make ends meet.

Build Back Better is precisely—precisely—about rekindling that faith in the American dream. That is no easy task. Americans face serious, severe challenges today that did not exist in the past. Raising a family is more difficult than ever. The challenges of finding and affording childcare and pre-K have grown exponentially. Seniors are struggling to afford basic drug care and basic drugs.

These are not luxury items. These aren't handouts or entitlements. These are essentials. They are essentials that families need in order to work and get ahead, and they are oftentimes much, much harder to afford than they were in the past.

That is what we mean by providing ladders to the middle class and helping families stay in the middle class. That is what we mean by reviving that sunny American optimism, which this country has lost in the last few decades. We have got to get it back, and the only way we can get it back is by bold action that gives people renewed hope in their futures and the future of their children.

The work we do right now will echo far into the 21st century. This is the best opportunity we have had in a long time to make sure that the decades to come will offer the same—or even greater—opportunities that Americans enjoyed in the past.

And if Democrats keep working together, if we keep our eye on the ultimate goal, and we keep negotiating to find that legislative sweet spot, then we will succeed in rewarding the trust that the American people have placed on us.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader is recognized.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, in a few days, President Biden is set to gas

up Air Force One and jet to Scotland for a global conference about the climate. According to press coverage, the President's agenda is clear:

"Biden Wants to Show the World He's Serious About Cutting Emissions."

"Joe Biden gets real on climate change."

What we are talking about here is a meeting to review a plan that failed to get its own signatories to meet its unenforceable "commitments;" a deal that couldn't compel the world's largest carbon producer, China, to commit to any less than another 9 years of rising emissions before it starts—starts—to turn things around. This is a country with single companies that emit more carbon than nations the size of Canada. Let me say that again. China is a country with single companies that emit more carbon than nations the size of Canada. And all the while, the United States, from outside the deal, cut our emissions more than any major country inside the deal. We cut our emissions more outside the deal than any of the countries inside the deal.

The Biden administration is desperately chasing bad deals to win applause from foreign leaders. That is what this is about: signing the American people up for self-inflicted pain for no meaningful gain.

The only thing that is serious about President Biden's environmental agenda is the trouble that it is already causing right here at home. Our adversaries like Russia are salivating over big windfalls while working American families are already feeling the pain.

Remember, on day one, this administration put a freeze on crucial development of domestic energy and killed the Keystone XL Pipeline, along with over 1,000 jobs. Combined with Democrats' flood of inflationary spending, it is no wonder consumers are facing the highest prices at the pump in 7 years, the most expensive home heating forecast in more than 12 years, and soaring prices on the household goods that are costing U.S. manufacturers more to make.

Ah, but wait. There is more. When President Biden jets off to next week's summit, his fellow Democrats will be busy plotting yet another reckless taxing-and-spending spree that would compound the pain with more anti-energy policies. They want to create new taxes on the most affordable and reliable forms of American energy that would put producers out of business, workers out of jobs, and make home heating even pricier this winter. They want to put billions more into "environmental and social justice block grants," whatever that means. They want to subsidize the favorite products of blue State elites, like electric cars and even—listen to this—electric bicycles.

Democrats also want to pour billions of dollars into a made-up government work program they are calling the Ci-

vilian Climate Corps—Civilian Climate Corps. This is pure socialist wish-fulfillment. We already have a worker shortage and record numbers of open jobs, but Democrats want taxpayers to put aside \$8 billion for make-work programs for young, liberal activists that they admit "[wouldn't] measurably reduce emissions."

Under their latest batch of proposed regulations, States that fail to keep pace with heavyhanded emissions targets would face "consequences"—consequences like freezes on funds for major transportation projects that employ lots of American workers. They want to bully every State to become more and more like California.

Washington Democrats are plowing ahead with all this precisely as the Ghost of Christmas Future is providing us with a cautionary tale from across the Atlantic. All across Europe, natural gas prices have jumped 400 percent since the start of the year. Countries are scrambling to rediscover and reactivate the reliable systems they had left behind to follow the latest fads.

Thanks in part to the Biden administration's own inaction, Putin's Russia has turned his controlling share of European gas production into a political weapon.

But instead of heeding this cautionary tale, President Biden seems to want to follow suit. His regulations have squandered the energy independence we enjoyed before he took office. U.S. imports of Russian oil have doubled. As gas prices soar, his administration is reportedly—listen to this—asking OPEC to cut us some slack.

As one academic summed it up, "Biden policy promotes a multiyear, multitrillion-dollar windfall" for adversaries—you heard it—like Russia.

To raise energy prices while enabling Moscow to tighten its grip over Europe's energy supply is to turbocharge a Russian regime that was staggering and showing its age.

Pain for the American people. Pay-offs for our adversaries so that President Biden can receive cheers from the crowd in Glasgow. Small comfort for his own citizens.

Energy policy isn't the only place where the Biden administration's decisions are hurting Americans. The President's retreat from Afghanistan continues to have dangerous and disastrous consequences. Yesterday, one Pentagon official gave Senators a new estimate of how many Americans the administration has left behind. The count Secretary Austin claimed last month—last month—was less than 100. That has now risen to 450 Americans left behind enemy lines. The Biden administration spent weeks insisting they only left about 100 Americans behind in Afghanistan when the truth was multiple times that. The administration has also continued to fail to keep its promises to brave Afghan allies.

Meanwhile, as many warned, the terrorist threat is growing in the wake of our retreat. The same Pentagon official

acknowledged that Afghanistan-based ISIS-K and al-Qaida terrorists have the intent and are acquiring the capability to strike the United States. ISIS-K could threaten our homeland in as little as 6 months. The Biden administration still doesn't have basing or access agreements in neighboring countries for its supposed plan to hit terrorists from "over the horizon." No wonder our adversaries are testing this President's resolve to protect American personnel and American interests.

A complex attack against U.S. forces in Syria last week may well have been carried out at the behest of Iran. The administration isn't saying. They need to come clean about who is responsible and how they intend to respond.

We know Tehran badly wants the United States and its partners out of Syria and Iraq and to continue to threaten Israel and other U.S. partners. What we don't know is what the Biden administration plans to do about it.

Even where progress should be easy, this administration finds ways to actually mess things up. For example, there is strong, bipartisan agreement about the threat the People's Republic of China poses to international security and specifically to American interests—case in point: Beijing's recent publicly reported efforts to test hypersonic weapons and advance their nuclear capabilities. China is also dramatically expanding the naval capabilities that they openly use to harass other nations.

Both Republicans and Democrats would welcome a clear and coherent China strategy from this administration, but all we are getting is a muddled mess. A few days ago, no sooner did President Biden offer comments on his own Taiwan policy than the White House staff rapidly walked it back. So it makes you want to ask, who is in charge over there—the President or the Press Secretary? American administrations have a tradition of handling Taiwan with something called strategic ambiguity. I am afraid the Biden team is taking that a little too literally. Even they themselves seem to have no idea what they are doing.

President Biden likes to say something like: Show me your budget, and I will tell you what you value. But President Biden's own request for the defense budget didn't even keep up with President Biden's inflation. The White House proposed to cut defense funding after inflation. And here in the Senate, Democrats' partisan appropriations process seems to shortchange defense in favor of runaway domestic spending. Even their ostensibly China-focused bill from earlier this year would not have included any funding for the kinds of advanced defense capabilities that we need to keep pace if it weren't for an amendment offered by Senator SASSE.

Even the NDAA is stuck in limbo. The defense authorization bill is our most basic opportunity to shape secu-

rity policy. It is a core duty for the Senate majority, the bare minimum, but Democrats have completely neglected the NDAA and the traditional robust and real floor process that it will need. They are too busy debating how much socialism to unleash on the country to look out for our troops, our veterans, and our national security.

This unseriousness will leave Americans less safe. It is just that simple.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVES SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Omar Antonio Williams, of Connecticut, to be United States District Judge for the District of Connecticut.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to seek unanimous consent to proceed to the consideration of two very qualified nominees to USAID. They are the kind of nominees who, in previous Congresses, would have been approved, without debate, through voice vote. I will make the motion, expecting, unfortunately, an objection. Then I will proceed to comments on why I think this is incredibly damaging to the United States to not proceed forward with these nominees.

Thus, Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate consider the following nominations: Calendar No. 323 and Calendar No. 337; that the nominations be confirmed; that the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate; that no further motions be in order on the nominations; that any related statements be printed in the RECORD; and that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. MARSHALL. Mr. President, EcoHealth Alliance received hundreds of millions of dollars in taxpayer grants and contracts, including \$65 million from USAID. This company and their research may well hold in their hands the smoking gun to getting to the bottom of COVID's origins, and millions of families who lost loved ones deserve closure.

Any Federal Agency that has given them money must be transparent and

provide Congress all information on what EcoHealth used that money for. We asked for this information months ago. USAID has failed to do so, and that is why I am here to object to these two unanimous consent requests.

Therefore, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, I would just ask unanimous consent for two incredibly qualified, noncontroversial Administrators at USAID.

Isobel Coleman is the nominee to be the USAID Deputy Administrator. She is a seasoned foreign policy professional who has been nominated by the President to oversee and provide strategic leadership over the Agency's programs. She has been previously confirmed by this body by unanimous consent. There are, as far as I can tell, no objections to her candidacy based upon the merits of it; and there were no objections to her candidacy to serve as our Ambassador to the U.N. for Management and Reform in December of 2014. She is a former Ambassador, and she has spent 20 years in the study and practice of global development. She has worked in the public and the private sectors.

I ask unanimous consent to proceed to the nomination of Marcela Escobari, the nominee for USAID Assistant Administrator for Latin America and the Caribbean. Ms. Escobari is a regional expert on Latin America and the Caribbean. She has previously served in the exact same role at the Agency, and she has done really incredible work reinforcing U.S. support work for Peace Colombia. She has been heavily engaged in the long-term development plan for Haiti, as well as in Congress's plans to double funding for Central America to try to stem the root causes of migration.

I think it is incredibly concerning that this blockade of capable diplomats, professional diplomats, continues on the Senate floor. By this time in the Trump administration, President Trump had had 22 Ambassadors who had been confirmed by the U.S. Senate, 17 of them by voice vote. Thus far, President Biden has had 4 Ambassadors confirmed.

Today, I was asking for consideration not of Ambassadors but of professionals who oversee the expenditure of U.S. taxpayer dollars abroad. There is nothing that Senate Republicans can do to stop the expenditure of taxpayer dollars in the Caribbean or Latin America. What they are preventing is the appointment and seating of individuals who oversee that funding, who represent us abroad.

This blockade—this unprecedented blockade—has never happened before in the history of the Senate. This kind of obstruction of standing in the way of the President's diplomatic team being seated compromises our national security. It makes us weaker as a nation.

As the President heads to the G20, he doesn't have Ambassadors seated to